

A Protest.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK :

Sirs:—Having waited until the last moment for the return of Mr. Lucas, who has been absent from the United States since the first of July and thus unable to speak for himself, I wish to enter a respectful but most earnest protest against Dr. Shufeldt's shameful slur on him, printed on page 265 of the last number of this journal. Whatever may be the custom in that part of the world from which Dr. Shufeldt wrote his letter for the July 'Auk,' it is not customary in most places for a person when fairly beaten in an argument to attack the honesty of his opponent with a cry of fraud. The reckless manner in which Dr. Shufeldt flings an untruth at his critic, and then declares that he will not re-open his "case" under any circumstances, might be amusing, perhaps, if both parties to the "case" were children; but in the present instance it is simply contemptible. Mr. Lucas had a right to expect better treatment, especially after the courtesy which he has invariably accorded Dr. Shufeldt, even when, as in the present case, the latter has been obviously and obstinately in error. As Mr. Lucas has already accomplished (*Science*, July 1, 1887, p. 12) what Dr. Shufeldt preferred merely to talk about, namely, the publication of a true copy of Dr. Shufeldt's original figure side by side with his (Mr. Lucas's (own tracing of the same) which Dr. Shufeldt claims was purposely mutilated to support a theory), no shadow of this unjust reflection remains where it was so ungenerously cast; and if it envelops its originator it only verifies the old proverb about curses and chickens. It is naturally unpleasant to acknowledge a mistake, but it is not likely to become easier the longer it is delayed. Even silence is preferable, however, to the attempt to defend an untenable position; and when such defence becomes incompatible with strict honesty, common sense allows a man but one course.

I feel that no apology is needed for calling attention to this matter now, for the principle violated lies at the very foundation of all science, and its general disregard would make utterly impossible that interchange of ideas which now constitutes the brightest hope of American ornithologists.

Very respectfully,

WALTER B. BARROWS.

Washington, D. C., August 31, 1887.

The Metric System.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK :—

Sirs: In 'The Auk' of April, 1884, Dr. Merriam presented 'A Plea for the Metric System in Ornithology,' which was editorially endorsed, and a request made asking 'all contributors to the pages of 'The Auk' to give their measurements in the metric system.'

Since then a few have done so, most of the writers have not, and each issue adds to the burden of inches and hundredths.